Several years ago, scientists at John Hopkins University surveyed almost 8,000 college students at forty-eight universities. One of the questions they were asked is: “What is your greatest goal in life?”

Being college and university students one might expect answers such as: “to make a lot of money,” or “to have a successful career,” or “to get married and live in a nice home.” Actually only 16% of those surveyed gave such answers.

But 75% of those surveyed said their greatest goal in life is to find the meaning and purpose of life.

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Sadly, most people spend their whole lives trying to find meaning and purpose and they leave this world without ever finding what they were looking for.

Doesn’t it seem logical that if meaning and purpose could be found in money and material things and pleasure that the American people ought to be the happiest, most satisfied people on earth? But the truth is the American people are among the unhappiest, most discontented people in the world.
Today I want to begin a series of messages from the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes that I have entitled: “Finding Meaning In A Meaningless World.”

Solomon is the author of three Old Testament Books. It is believed he wrote The Song of Solomon when he was a young man. He wrote Proverbs when he was a middle-aged man. And he wrote The Book of Ecclesiastes in the twilight years of his life.

In this series of messages we are going to follow Solomon on his own journey to find meaning in this meaningless world. As we will see, most of this book is a raw, realistic, cynical, and even depressing look at life on earth until we get down to the climactic twelfth chapter where Solomon reveals where one can find the true meaning of life.

Alistair Begg describes Ecclesiastes this way: “Throughout most of the Book of Ecclesiastes we find Solomon climbing to the highest rung on the ladder of riches....education....success...work .....pleasure....and power only to discover in the end, he had his ladder leaning against the wrong wall.”

Well, let's begin our journey, shall we? Please follow along with me as I read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11 (NKJV)

1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

2 “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher; “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

3 What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?

4 One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever.

5 The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it arose.
6 The wind goes toward the south, and turns around to the north; the wind whirls about continually, and comes again on its circuit.

7 All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again.

8 All things are full of labor; man cannot express it. the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

9 That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.

10 Is there anything of which it may be said, “See, this is new”? It has already been in ancient times before us.

11 There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come by those who will come after.

In these verses Solomon makes two assessments of life on earth.

First of all.....

I. Life On Earth Is FLEETING (vs. 1-7)

1. Imagine Solomon is preaching to you this morning. He stands behind the pulpit and begins his sermon with these words: “Vanity of vanities; vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

2. While I'm sure those words would grab your attention, it certainly wouldn't set a very positive tone for his message would it?
3. We must remember, this is a negative assessment of life from a man who grew cynical after trying to find the meaning of life in everything but GOD.

4. When we think of that word “vanity” we think of someone who is proud or arrogant or stuck on themselves. But that is not what the word vanity means here.

   The Hebrew word for vanity is the word hebel. Hebel means: meaningless......worthless.....or without value.

5. Solomon uses that word “hebel” five times in this second verse. He uses it thirty-eight more times throughout the rest of Ecclesiastes.

   What Solomon is saying is, “Meaningless, meaningless, life here on earth is absolutely meaningless.”

6. Solomon follows up his cynical assessment of life with a rhetorical question in verse 3.....

   Ecclesiastes 1:3 (NKJV) What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?

7. If Solomon lived in our day he might compare life to riding a stationery exercise bike. You peddle and peddle just as hard as you can go and when life is over what do you really have to show for all your efforts?
8. In **verses 4-7** Solomon uses four examples from nature to prove his point that we are caught in a meaningless, unending cycle of life.

(A) The example of **THE EARTH** (v.4)

v. 4 One generation passes away; and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever.

Solomon is saying, “You are born into this world, you live your life, then you die, but the earth keeps right on going. In one column of the newspaper you have the birth announcements and in another you have the obituaries. One generation comes, while another generation goes.

Like footprints in the desert sand, we are here and then we are gone.

(B) The example of **THE SUN** (v.5)

v.5 The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it arose.

The sun is on a monotonous cycle of rising, then setting, then racing back to the same place it rose the day before.
That verb “hastens” literally means “to pant.” The sun is just like a runner making endless circles around a racetrack. Every day the sun rises and then races around the earth so it can do it all over again.

(C) The example of THE WIND (v. 6)

v. 6 The wind goes toward the south and turns around to the north; the wind whirls about continually, and comes again on its circuit.

As the sun is on a continuous east to west course, Solomon now describes the wind moving north and south.

Long before the days of meteorologists and satellite imagery, Solomon displays a keen understanding of the constant movement of the jet streams and trade-winds that circle the globe as the earth rotates on its axis.

Day after day after day these winds circle the earth round and round in a monotonous cycle and never stop.

(D) The example of THE RIVERS (v.7)

v. 7 All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again.

Day after day, the rivers empty into the sea, and yet the seas are never filled or over-flowing because moisture evaporates into the atmosphere. It is an endless cycle.
9. From Solomon's skeptical viewpoint our being here doesn't change anything. Generations came and went before us and they will continue to do so after us.

The sun rose and set and rose again every day before we got here and it will continue to do so after we are dead and gone.

The winds were going round and round the earth before we were born and they will keep doing so after we're gone.

The rivers flowed into sea before we were born and they will continue to flow into the sea after we are gone.

10. These things just remind us how fleeting our lives on earth truly are.

As we move on to verses 8-11, Solomon gives us another assessment of life and that is:

II. Life On Earth Is FUTILE (vs. 8-11)

1. In these four verses, Solomon has concluded that everything in this world will ultimately disappoint us. And he gives us three reasons why he has reached that conclusion.
REASON #1

There is no **SATISFACTION** to be found in life on earth.

v. 8 All things are full of labor; man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

Many of us “baby boomers” can remember the hit song made famous by the Rolling Stones, “I Can't Get No Satisfaction.” Sadly, that song could have been written by Solomon three thousand years ago.

Like Mick Jagger and the Stones, Solomon had it all, and then some.

- He had **more wealth** than he knew what to do with, and yet he still wanted more

- He had **more women** than one man can possibly handle, and yet he still wasn't satisfied.

- He enjoyed **more of life's pleasures** than any man who lived before him, and yet he was never satisfied. He wanted more.

You see, that is the emptiness this world leaves us with. It is like eating “cotton candy,” it tastes good for just a moment and then it vanishes almost as soon as you put it in your mouth; and it never fills you up. You can **read the greatest book you've ever read**......**hear the most beautiful song you've ever heard**......**see the greatest movie you have ever seen**.... **enjoy the greatest thrill you have ever experienced** and you will still be left wanting for more. There is no satisfaction to be found in life on earth.
In verses 9, 10 Solomon gives us a second reason why life on earth is futile and that is........

**REASON #2**

There is nothing **NEW** under the sun.

v.9 That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.

v.10 Is there anything of which it may be said, “See, this is new”? It has already been in ancient times before us.

What Solomon is saying is, “If you are waiting for the next new thing to come along that will satisfy like nothing before it, you are going to be sadly disappointed.”

What we may perceive as “progress” is actually history repeating itself over and over again. Its as though we keep “circling the same block” time and time again.

**New fashions** are just updated clones of fashions from previous generations. **New hairstyles** are just updated versions of hairstyles worn in times past. **New religions** are nothing more than old religions wrapped in a different name. **New TV shows** are nothing more than updated versions of old TV shows.

The French have a proverb that goes like this: “**The more things change, the more they turn out to be the same.**” Or as baseball legend YOGI BERRA used to say, “**It's deja vu all over again.**” There truly is “nothing **NEW** under the sun.”
In verse 11, Solomon gives us a third reason why life on earth is futile, and that is..........

**REASON #3**

No one is even **REMEMBERED** when his life on earth is done.

\[v. \, 11\] There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come by those who will come after.

One hundred years from now no one will remember you ever lived. That is a very sobering thought, isn't it? One hundred years from now no one will remember what you and I did for a living, or what kind of house we lived in, or what kind of vehicle we drove. In fact, there is a good possibility our descendants won't even know our name.

Mark Twain once said, “The world will lament you for one hour and forget you forever.”

Now if you're like me, this leaves you feeling empty, like “if no one is even going to remember me, then what meaning and purpose does my life have?” That is exactly the point Solomon is making. He wants us to feel an overwhelming sense of emptiness because emptiness points us to GOD, OUR HEAVENLY FATHER. The emptiness of this life should cause us to turn to GOD to find a greater meaning and purpose for our lives.
CONCLUSION

If I just concluded the message right here, we could all leave here today feeling discouraged and depressed as though our lives have no meaning or purpose.

But when you look through your biblical binoculars to the very last chapter of Ecclesiastes, Solomon gives us the hope we are looking for.

Ecclesiastes 12:13,14 (NKJV)  Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

What Solomon is telling us is this: “Don't make the same mistakes I did. I searched the whole world over for the meaning and purpose of life and didn't find it. It was only when I began to LOVE GOD and LIVE FOR GOD that I found meaning in this meaningless world.

My friend, do you feel as though your life is empty and without meaning? JESUS has the life you have been looking for. Why don't you come and surrender your life to Him today?